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MEMORANDUM

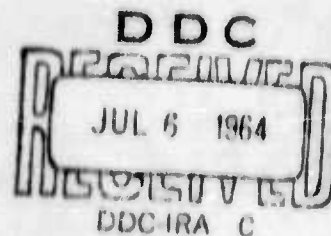
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JUNE 1964

CERTAIN EFFECTS OF CULTURE AND SOCIAL  
ORGANIZATION ON INTERNAL SECURITY  
IN THAILAND

H. P. Phillips and D. A. Wilson

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PREPARED FOR:  
ADVANCED RESEARCH PROJECTS AGENCY

The RAND Corporation  
SANTA MONICA • CALIFORNIA

**MEMORANDUM**  
**RM-3786-ARPA (ABRIDGED)**  
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PREFACE

This Memorandum was prepared as part of RAND's continuing research effort for the Advanced Research Projects Agency's Project AGILE. It addresses itself to selected aspects of the politics, administration, social organization, and culture of rural Thailand that are closely related to the problem of maintaining and strengthening the country's internal security.

RAND consultants Herbert Phillips (Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley) and David Wilson (Associate Professor of Political Science, University of California, Los Angeles) are intimately familiar with Thai institutions, cultural patterns, and administrative characteristics. They both spent several years in Thailand during the 1950's conducting intensive social and political research.

The present Memorandum draws on their own experience and observations as well as on the open literature on Thailand (see the Bibliography, pp. 43-45). The particular aspects discussed in the paper were carefully chosen for their significance in the present Thai scene. However, they clearly represent only a small part of

the complex problem of internal security. It is hoped that the authors' observations and suggestions may open up avenues for further investigation and will prove useful to those whose research or planning in Thailand must take into account the nature of rural Thai society.



SUMMARY

The basic assumption of this Memorandum is that modifications in Thai society aimed at strengthening internal security are likely to be the more effective the more fully they take into account the motivations and attitudes of the Thai people and the functioning of Thai institutions. Because of the nebulous character of the communist threat as it is perceived at the local level, the justification and usefulness of any future security measures should not be limited to that threat; a straight anticommunist approach is unlikely to engage the average villager's interest and co-operation. On the other hand, a program that satisfies some of his existing needs -- by traditional means, wherever possible -- promises success.

An important aspect of the relationship of the villagers of Thailand to their government, and one that is easily overlooked, is the ritualism of Thai public life. The acting out of authority relationships is a significant psychological dimension of the social order. To preserve this ritualism is important for two reasons. First, as the Thai bureaucracy has become more and more rationalized, contact between village and government



has lessened and the relationship has become loose and distant. A revival of the ritual of official government visits by the district officer or other dignitaries could greatly strengthen these relations. Second, the Thai are apt to attach at least as much significance to the propriety of government programs as to their efficiency; benefits incorrectly bestowed are likely to cause such resentment as to defeat their purpose.

An attendant difficulty in the present relationship of the government to the villages is the inadequacy of communication between them. The government is poorly informed about the state of the rural population, possibly because it is too heavily occupied with national and international concerns. The representative assembly has not been an effective channel of information, partly because it is drawn from the country's social and economic elite, and its members' origins and ties are almost exclusively urban. Attempts by the central authorities to promote some degree of self-government at the local level have not been successful, possibly because the Thai are too accustomed by tradition to strong central leadership and a hierarchic order of government.

The most effective Thai institution in the past has been the civil administration. But the level at which the official government service meets the general population -- the district office -- has become overburdened with routine tasks. Hence the district officer in many cases is unable to keep in close touch with the people. This Memorandum suggests the possibility of setting up a professional regional service that would close this gap in communication by serving as a channel of information and responsive action between villagers and official echelons.

Thai villages, as a rule, are lacking in organized groups that reflect village solidarity. Social life is structured around the family, and to a considerable extent around the loosely organized community of the temple, whose lay committee handles only temple business. Government organizations, such as the village councils, are dependent for success on the uncertain leadership of the district office. The headman's ability as a leader is limited by the fact that he is caught in the middle, a local man representing the villagers but also trying to serve the government's interests.

In the development of new community activities, two village personages are of potential significance: the schoolteacher, who is likely to be "modern" in outlook and respected and powerful in his village, and the abbot of the temple who, with his great prestige, can affect the course of any communal effort.

In the actual organization of a community program directed at the strengthening of internal security, three groups in the Thai village who might be mobilized to good effect are the veterans, the unemployed, and the village youths. Their marginal position makes them likely targets of communist organizers, and any government program that employed them, therefore, would do much to thwart such communist efforts at recruitment. To be successful, however, such a program would have to be constructive and personally gratifying; it would have to create opportunities and provide skills of real value, and to reward its participants with wages and social status.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The assumption upon which this paper is based is that any measures aimed at strengthening the internal security of Thailand are likely to be most effective if they are carried out in the light of motivations and attitudes of the Thai people and with recognition of the way in which Thai institutions function.<sup>1</sup> The effect of this assumption is to direct attention to the cultural patterns and social structure of contemporary Thailand and to call for an assessment of the potentialities and limitations inherent in them.

Because the communist threat in Thailand, in the authors' opinion, is still intangible, and because insurgency may never actually occur, security measures should have some practical merit in the eyes of Thai villagers and administrators over and above their usefulness in combatting the communist threat. For,

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<sup>1</sup>This paper is not intended to provide basic data on the culture or the social and political organization of rural Thailand. Such descriptive materials are readily available; see Bibliography under the following: deYoung 1955; Fraser 1960; Hanks 1959a, 1959b, 1962; Hanks and Phillips 1961; Kaufman 1960; Kingshill 1960; Klausner 1955-1956; Labcharoen 1960; Moerman 1961, 1962a, 1962b; Mosel 1957, 1961; Pendelton 1962; Phillips 1958, 1963a, 1963b; Sharp 1950, 1957; Sharp, Hauck, Janlekha and

somewhat paradoxically, the major difficulty in developing an effective counterinsurgency program in Thailand is the fact that there is as yet little awareness at the local level of a direct or immediate communist threat within the country. Political realities in Laos and Vietnam clearly indicate that such a threat may arise. But, with few exceptions, Thai peasants have been neither threatened by nor compelled to feed communist insurgents. They have not been asked (except perhaps by opium smugglers) to report on the movements of the border police or the Thai army. Moreover, the political life of most Thai peasants remains largely uneventful, with the possible exception of government-sponsored excursions for village headmen, visits of USIS-sponsored information teams (The Reporter, October 25, 1962), and the recent requirement that all Thai nationals carry identification cards (Bangkok Post, August 16 and 20, 1962). On the whole, the security problems encountered in Thai rural communities are those that have always troubled Thai villagers and provincial authorities: theft, young men

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Textor 1953; Sharp, Moore, Vella and Associates 1956; Wilson 1962a, 1962b; Wilson and Phillips 1958. Reference will be made to these data only to the extent that they bear on the central subject of this paper.



terrorizing neighboring villages, cattle rustling and boat stealing, crimes of passion, and the difficulty of controlling the phi bun (literally, "meritorious spirits," but actually charismatic leaders who gain a following through their religious or magical powers).

It is true that communist association with some of these problems has given them a more portentous cast. The police have alleged, for example, that some of the cattle-rustling gangs in the northeast were organized by communist agents (Bangkok Post, March 13 and 31, 1962). Too, one of the major suspects in the "Northeast Communist Conspiracy Case" was a young attorney who gained considerable fame by representing villagers in court free of charge. But, although there obviously is some communist influence, the villager probably does not yet recognize its character and political identity. It may be significant that the northeastern youths who crossed the border to fight for Khong Le when he was associated with the Pathet Lao explained their actions, not by saying that they "considered themselves Lao," or that they were "dissatisfied with the Bangkok government," or even that "Khong Le is a great man," but simply by such statements as "it was the dry season and I had nothing else to



do" and "I thought it would be fun." Whether they were being honest or not, their explanations would have seemed normal and plausible to the average peasant.<sup>2</sup> It requires no special pleading to recruit a group of youths for adventure and a chance to gain fame and power.

The strongest radio signals in northeastern and northern Thailand are from communist stations, and the villagers listen to them, but they do so for the same reasons that they listen to the weaker government stations: for the playing of local or regional music and the performance of indigenous comedy and drama. What little evidence there is (Moerman 1961, Mosel 1963) strongly suggests that villagers either ignore or distrust the thinly-veiled political broadcasts of both the Communists and the government, preferring to rely on

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<sup>2</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, all direct quotations in this paper are drawn from interviews by Herbert Phillips with a number of Thai assistant district officers, most of them with a peasant background. The explanations cited here were reported by one of them, who had met a group of these young volunteers when they were returning home from Laos at the beginning of the planting season (a period when they did have "something to do"). A striking aspect of this encounter is the fact that it never occurred to the Assistant District Officer to arrest the boys, report them, or in any way consider them a source of concern. In fact, he told the author of their escapade with a touch of admiration and even envy, not apprehension or suspicion.

word-of-mouth transmission for "credible" political information.

These remarks are not intended to minimize the extent of the communist threat; they merely point up its nebulous nature as perceived at the local level. The Communists in Thailand have tried to induce boys to fight for them for adventure and fame rather than ideology, they are giving people "things to do" during periods of unemployment, and they are providing villagers with expensive services free of charge. Thus, they are exploiting precisely those traditional motivations which the Thai government should consider in devising the non-military portion of any counterinsurgency program.

The inference to be drawn from these introductory observations is that a program designed to strengthen internal security ought not to make anticommunism its organizing principle. On the contrary, such a program should seek to base itself on existing needs, as presumably the Communists for their part will try to do. Moreover, it should seek to satisfy such needs by traditional means wherever possible.

## II. THE PROBLEM OF THE THAI VILLAGE ADMINISTRATION

The present Thai government obviously has several advantages over the Communists in dealing with the peasantry. Its representatives have more money than the Communists; it has organizational freedom; it has authority; it has political legitimacy; and it has popular acceptance. Political legitimacy in Thailand, however, is not an invariable attribute; it must be continually validated. Most of the difficulty in the northeast today is due to the fact that, until recently, the government has tended to ignore the need to validate its position either through certain rituals or by providing practical services. The former involve such things as government-sponsored civil and religious ceremonies, visits by government officials of all levels, and singling out and rewarding individuals known to have special associations with the region.<sup>3</sup> The latter include the

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<sup>3</sup>It is not insignificant that most individuals who have gained national prominence as "northeasterners" or as "representatives of northeastern interests" have almost invariably been identified as belonging to some anti-government group. It is inexplicable that more has not been done to publicize the northeastern background of Field Marshal Sarit and other high government and military officials, especially in the northeast itself.

building and financing of new wells and reservoirs, institution of health services, provision of food during periods of blight or flood, and, most important to the villagers, repair and construction of village temples. Thai and U.S. administrators tend to value practical services as the chief means by which the government affirms its legitimacy, and, in this respect, American foreign-aid philosophy has greatly influenced Thai budgetary thinking. In the authors' judgment, however, the government's ritualistic functions are of equal, and perhaps even greater, importance to the peasantry.

Questions of legitimacy, of course, are ultimately based upon the villagers' conceptions of the nature and role of government. Thai peasants are like the citizens of most countries in assuming that any regime is acceptable first of all by virtue of its capacity to establish and maintain authority. But, beyond this, they have more or less explicit expectations about the nature of that authority and their relationship to it. These expectations are crucial in shaping their loyalty to the authority, their readiness to subvert it, or their indifference to it -- factors that play a determining role in the success or failure of rural-based revolutionary

warfare. The Thai peasants' expectations and definitions of government are relatively simple: they look to their government as a source of gentle, benevolent concern; as an organization that in its ideal form has the attributes of a strong, wise, but indulgent father. This analogy is not a literary one; villagers, in talking to one of the authors, made it quite explicit when they said: "The government is like our father and we are like its children." By the same token, they hope that, like a good Thai father, the government will be neither meddlesome nor exploitative in dealing with its "children." Thus, while villagers very much want the government to be present, they do not want it to be heavy-handed. They welcome, for example, the modern medicines that are available to them at government dispensaries, but they are highly sensitive to being looked down upon or overcharged by the dispensing health officer. At such moments, they are considerably more aware of the insult suffered, real or imagined, than of the medical benefits received, even though such medical help may theretofore have been unobtainable.

This is why the ritual acts of government are so immensely important. They represent to the peasant not

only expressions of the regime's interest in him but acknowledgments of his own importance to the government. Villagers assume, for example, that when a government official "goes to the trouble" (their phrase) of visiting them, he does so not only to express his benevolent concern but also because he needs them to reaffirm and legitimate his own position. Whether he be a district officer or a deputy minister, an official thus provides them with the opportunity to play out their part of the political dialogue, for villagers actually enjoy making known to those in power their willingness to be ruled. Indeed, this is to them one of the major pleasures of being a citizen.

Every encouragement, therefore, should be given to Thai officialdom to expand or reinstate these traditional functions of government, and thus once again to establish its officials as active elements in the dynamic structure of authority. A regrettable effect of the rationalization of Thai bureaucracy has been the diminution of these activities, as rural officials have become increasingly burdened with paper work and other administrative tasks that tie them to their desks.

One contribution to a solution of the problem might be the simple requirement that every district officer in Thailand spend considerable time visiting the villages (tambon or muban, depending upon local settlement patterns) under his jurisdiction, with a view to determining local wants and the extent to which he might realistically meet them. Though, at best, this would enable him to visit a given village only at intervals, this would represent a great improvement over the present. (According to the assistant district officers interviewed, there are district officers, including the informants' superiors, who not once during their tours of duty have ventured into any village.) Indeed, such visits should not be too frequent, lest the district officers be regarded as meddlers who disturb the daily routine of village life and who, if they have to be fed and housed, become a financial burden to the local people, especially if they are accompanied by a retinue. Because status and symbolic considerations are crucial on these occasions, such trips should not be delegated to assistant district officers or other junior members of the district officer's staff.



From the point of view of stimulating village loyalties, this procedure would be far more effective than the practice, current in the northeast, of taking village headmen on excursions to Bangkok or to provincial centers, there to be entertained and lectured on anti-communism. It is the authors' observation that the latter practice is based upon an untenable assumption about the nature of Thai rural social organization, that is, on the belief that the sense of loyalty and obligation created in the individual headman will extend to villagers under him. Most evidence indicates that it cannot, mainly because no headman would presume to control the loyalties and obligations of others. Regular visits by the district officers would seem to have an advantage also over the traveling service teams, recently organized by the Ministry of the Interior, that provide contact between the administration and isolated villages. While useful in furnishing these villages sporadic medical assistance and supplying them with small tools and construction material, these teams lack the permanence and familiarity of the district officer, with whom it is possible and profitable for the villagers to develop mutual obligations and personal loyalties. There are

bound to be villagers, for example, who will want to cultivate the connection created by the visit of a government official, with a view to the possibility of their visiting him in turn to ask for favors and counsel. And if he is the district officer, they will not have to travel as far as Bangkok to see him. Such a program of personal visits, therefore, if it is not carried out perfunctorily, might serve to revive the paternalistic quasi-familial relationship that once obtained between peasant and government official, the most substantial basis for political loyalty.

As to the role that practical services might play in strengthening the relationship between government and peasant, two considerations loom especially large.

First, despite appearances to the contrary, Thailand has no strong tradition of the government operating as a service agency. That is to say, villagers do not assume that the purpose of government is to provide for them. To be sure, a munificent and benevolent government does bestow gifts upon the people, but the giving turns upon the inclinations of the governors, not upon the wants of the governed. Since the villagers look on practical services as a gift rather than as their due, the manner

in which such services are offered becomes to them just as important as the fact that they are provided. If government help is to buy political loyalty, it must be an unmistakable expression of the government's benevolence and concern. Thus, any funds that the Thai or U.S. governments may be investing in practical service projects for the northeast may prove politically sterile if the sole concern is for the projects' technical success ("will the well pumps draw water?"), and no attention is given to the spirit and form in which this support is proffered. Villagers are inordinately sensitive to the comportment of a government official; how they are treated by him tends to become more important than the reason for the official's presence, no matter how beneficial it may be.

The second point concerns what may be an inevitable concomitant of any government program designed to bring practical services on a large scale to village communities. Frank recognition should be given to the possibility that the rural populations' assessment of government will become more critical as the rate of governmental activity among them increases. Thus, paradoxically, social services, economic development programs, and the like may help create a situation in which subversive political

forces have more rather than fewer targets. (In a central plain village which one of the authors came to know intimately, there was not a single adult villager who did not expect some financial "nibbling" at government service projects as intrinsic to their financing.) This is not to deny the utility of government service projects but simply to draw attention to their inherent risks. As the scale of these projects increases, so will the potential for "nibbling." It is essential, therefore, that corruption be kept to a minimum lest it become politically harmful. If it increases in scope, however, it will weaken the moral posture that government invariably assumes when introducing social welfare projects to villages, and it will make the peasants ever more aware of the gap between promise and performance. Thai villagers tend to evaluate government service projects less by the quality of the performance than by the degree to which it falls short of what the government had promised (or more precisely, what they think the government had promised). (Sharp 1950 is especially cogent on this point.)

### III. THE STRUCTURE OF AUTHORITY AND THE FLOW OF INFORMATION

The three kinds of institutions in Thailand that would appear to facilitate the flow of information between the countryside and Bangkok are the representative assembly, the civil administration, and the various local institutions of self-government. None of these, however, has been wholly successful in this respect.

In 1932, the year of the revolution, an ostensibly representative national assembly was established in Thailand by popular election and with the authority to control legislation and administration. From the very beginning, however, the attitude of the new Thai leaders toward the national assembly was somewhat ambivalent. Their bureaucratic background inclined many of them toward a strong executive government and nourished their suspicions of an unprecedented and unpredictable body of men, each of whom had his personal sources of power. These new leaders would have preferred an assembly consisting of wise and gentle counselors who, by expressing the consensus of the nation, would provide the administration with the guidance and information it needed in governing the country. Their view ran counter to the doctrinaire belief that an

assembly's proper function was to serve as a watchdog for the public interest and as the embodiment of a general will that commanded government. This radical viewpoint, which had little basis in Thai tradition but had come home in the luggage of students returning from Europe, turned out to be the prevalent one among the men who were elected to the national assembly. The tensions between the executive and the legislative side of the government that arose from this conflict of basic attitudes have resulted in rendering the national assembly ineffectual.

Although the constitution guarantees it a powerful position, the national assembly, in its ambivalent role, has never succeeded in developing its potential authority. During its short life since 1932, it has suffered the indignity of being summarily closed, dissolved, and reorganized.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, fear that it may not always

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<sup>4</sup>In the various governments that preceded the interim regime of Field Marshal Sarit, the national representative body took different forms. These included several bicameral assemblies, with the lower house elected by the people and the upper house either appointed (1957-1961) or elected by special procedures (1946-1947), as well as a single house (1932-1946 and 1951-1957) consisting of two categories of members -- one elected and the other appointed by the cabinet. Today, all members are appointed, and the national assembly serves concurrently as legislature and constitutional commission.

behave in a representative and competent manner has caused various safeguards to be provided in the constitution against the independence of its elected representatives.

Another cause of weakness is that parliamentary groups have little strength outside the assembly. Parties are poorly organized and lack any substantial popular base. Though individual members of parliament may be strong within their constituencies, there are no nationwide organizations to impose discipline within the assembly. The political solitude of its members contributes to the overwhelming dominance of the executive over the assembly. Bearing the immense prestige of His Majesty's government and supported by the bureaucracy in general and the military in particular, the cabinet is usually able to prevail over the assembly. It has managed, with rare exceptions, to impose by various means an iron discipline on its majority and to ignore whatever opposition there may have been. The assembly, therefore, has had little effect on the making and implementation of policy.

Even though it has never exercised its full constitutional powers, the national assembly has nevertheless



become a fixed institution within the political system. Moreover, it serves certain functions besides the purely symbolic.

Aside from its formal legislative powers, the assembly performs at least two political functions. The first is related to regionalism, the most serious divisive force in the society of the kingdom. Regional feeling is strong in the outer reaches of the country, particularly in the northeastern and northern provinces. In the not-too-distant past, these areas were outside the direct administration of the Bangkok monarchy, ruled by hereditary princes or governors and in opposition to the central government on ethnic, economic, linguistic, and cultural, as well as historical, grounds. It is the national assembly that today provides regional notables with a means of gaining prestige in the capital and a forum for airing their grievances. To the extent that the assembly performs this function, it links the outer areas of the country to the center and siphons off many of the pressures that otherwise might lead to the development of ever more irascible local feelings. Most of the outspoken regional critics of the central government either have been in the assembly or have hopes of being there some day. The link

that the assembly creates between the regional leaders and Bangkok is of obvious importance in the organization of internal security.

The national assembly is valuable as a forum, not only for these regional representatives, but for the display of a broader, though still limited, range of political attitudes. The changing nature of Thai society results in the circulation of a great many different ideas and points of view, both traditional and novel, and a large number of these receive a hearing on the assembly floor. They are not in every case to be interpreted as the work of a pressure group seeking to modify legislation in a purposeful manner. Thailand is almost completely lacking in organizations that might give currency to the interests of particular groups. Thus, the assembly helps to make articulate the voice of public opinion.

In large measure, the national assembly represents the social, economic, and political elite of the country. The overwhelming majority of its members have always been civil or military bureaucrats, lawyers, and schoolteachers. Those who do not come from Bangkok have their origins in provincial towns. Thus, in a predominantly agricultural country, farmers and their interests have had only very small representation. (See Wilson 1962b.)

Both the interior administration and local government are at present in a state of flux. Generally speaking, interior administration has been direct and highly centralized. The two basic administrative units are the province (changwat) and the district (amphur). The senior official in each of the seventy-one provinces is the governor, a professional civil servant of high rank appointed by the Crown upon nomination by the office of the undersecretary in the Ministry of the Interior. Also operating at the provincial level are officials of the police department and of various ministries (Education, Agriculture, Finance, and others) that work with the governor. In the 448 districts, the senior official is the district officer, a professional civil servant appointed by the Department of the Interior (in the Ministry of the Interior), who works with officials from other ministries much as the governor does at the provincial level. These district officers and ministerial officials are under the control of the governor and represent the lowest level of professional administration.

Within the district, there are two kinds of administrative units, the lower being the villages or hamlets (muban), which are grouped into the larger communes

(tambon). Every village has a headman, chosen from among the villagers. The headmen of a commune choose one of their number to be commune chief. Neither of these two offices is part of the professional service.

In recent years the central authorities have made some efforts to develop local self-government. In fact, as early as 1933 an act was passed for the establishment of self-governing municipalities, but the experiment was not very successful. Since then, a number of legislative enactments have established new institutional arrangements aimed at self-government: the elected provincial and commune councils, the sanitary district, and the reorganized municipalities. There is little evidence, however, that these have come to play a vital role (Thailand, Department of the Interior, 1958).

Local councils have never acquired the needed authority, and traditional patterns of local authority run counter to the ideas of commune and village councils. The lack of popular response can be explained partly by a genuine skepticism about such councils, not only in the villages but on the part of administrative officials at the level of the governor and the district officer, who are expected to provide leadership. In the village, this

skepticism is intensified by a traditional predilection for strong outside authority and leadership in any co-operative action (see Phillips 1963b).

The administrative institutions have been far more effective, because they correspond most nearly to Thai conceptions of the way things work. The Thai expect authority to correspond with status, and status to correspond with official rank. Therefore, the hierarchic structure of an administrative bureaucracy stimulates their positive response and provides motivations and means for administrative control.

The district officer is the most important figure in the administration of internal security in rural Thailand. The historical circumstances which account for the institution of his office present some interesting parallels with the contemporary situation. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the integrity of the system of government of the Thai peoples was threatened by challenges that originated in the empire-building of Great Britain in Upper Burma and the Northern Malay states, and of France in Cambodia and Laos. The Siamese government at the time consisted of a rather chaotic set of institutions tied together by personal allegiances and tributes that

were focused in several centers, the most important of them Bangkok. At the outer limits these lines of loyalty became attenuated and often confused. Thus, Chiangmai, Chiang (Xiang) Khuang, or Phnom Penh might pay tribute not only to Bangkok but to other centers, such as Hué or a Burmese capital. These remote regions were the most susceptible to imperialist manipulation, and in the course of events Britain and France did indeed gain control of many of the outer territories. The Thai government's response to this challenge was to solidify its control over what it regarded as its territory, in order to prevent further penetration by the imperialists. To this end, the throne appointed lord lieutenants to serve above the existing governors or local lords (chao), and district officers to serve between the latter and the people. This reorganization was carried out gradually over a number of years. Eventually, the hereditary governors and chao were replaced by civil servants, and a fully centralized system provided the kind of information and degree of administrative responsiveness that permitted the government to meet the threats to its authority.

Today, this system is no longer fully adequate to the demands of a changed situation. Although the causes

of this inadequacy are different from the reasons that prompted administrative reforms in the late nineteenth century, the historical comparison may well hold a useful lesson for those in search of a course of action. The Thai government at present is suffering from the results of a communication gap. It needs more information than the existing administrative structure provides if it is going to ensure internal security. The Communists, on the other hand, are penetrating villages with agents and workers, who gather information and build organizations that mobilize the energies of the idle and disaffected. Any success they may have will necessarily be attributable to superior information and organization. The government, the authors believe, must neutralize these efforts by using comparable techniques.

As already suggested, the administration's presence in the village might be strengthened if district officers were required to make periodic visits to the communities under their jurisdiction. The main value of such visits would lie in their affording villagers a sense of participation in the governmental process and giving district officers an opportunity to determine local needs and ways of meeting them. To the extent that they provided some



villagers with a means for re-establishing traditional patron-client ties, they would be additionally useful.

Beyond this, however, the district officer's capacity to exercise informational and organizational functions in the villages is severely limited. For one thing, his administrative responsibilities have so mushroomed in recent years as to allow for little more than the formal accomplishment of paper work. Horrigan (1959) reports that already "there exist some hundred separate functions which have been assigned to the district officer" (p. 179). Needless to say, most of these functions derive from the bureaucratic needs of administrators in Bangkok and are not necessarily relevant to local district affairs. As a result, the district officer today has little time and energy left for the concerns of his villagers.

Moreover, the district officer illustrates the widening social, economic, and cultural gap between the rural population and the educated leadership of the country. Though this factor should not be overemphasized, it is of some importance. As members of the Thai elite are gaining in educational and bureaucratic experience, they are becoming increasingly assimilated to the ethos of industrial society. It would be difficult to say how

far this process has progressed. But to the extent that it has, it inhibits communication between the district officer and his population. It is not to be supposed that the typical district officer is unhappy in his work and would prefer to be in a ministry in Bangkok. Indeed, Horrigan indicates that the morale of the provincial administrators is good and that they take considerable pride in their jobs. The main problem lies in the fundamental differences in outlook between the official and the people.

What kind of administrative institution could be developed that would bridge the informational and organizational gap between village and central government? Various ideas have already been put forward, including the establishment of a local peace corps and the setting up of village committees. The authors' suggestion would be for the formation of a professionally trained provincial service, which would work in the intermediate area of the communes to build a strong link between the central administration and whatever local self-government might exist or develop. By "professional" training we mean something comparable to the qualifications of the literate and generally well-informed village schoolteacher.

Something approaching this function is envisaged in the present training of village workers for the community development program. The service suggested in this memorandum, however, would encompass much wider responsibilities. Its tasks would be to maintain daily contact with villages, provide reports ranging from population statistics to general judgments on local attitudes, and supply organizational leadership to whatever local self-government committees might exist. It should have no police powers, its primary purpose being to provide a link in communication and to personify the government. To be effective in their function, members of the service must have official status and adequate salaries. They should come from outside the community (but not the region), so as to preclude any political or social obligations to individual villagers. Most important perhaps, they must have the full support of their district officers in the recommendations they make and in the programs they implement.

From a political and psychological point of view, their job would not be easy. Although agents of the central government are closely affiliated with the district office, they would be representing the villagers' interests

in the community. This role of "political broker"<sup>5</sup> -- which would be a new phenomenon in Thai administrative institutions -- could be played effectively only so long as the district officer was genuinely concerned with the welfare of his villagers and therefore sympathetic and helpful to members of such a service. Although a departure from tradition, it would be most likely to find acceptance in those parts of rural Thailand where the need for improved communication is felt most acutely by both the district officer and the people. The success of such a program, of course, would depend almost completely upon the quality of the personnel selected.

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<sup>5</sup>The term "political broker," coined by the anthropologist Eric Wolf (1956) has been used by Moerman (1962a) to characterize the role of the headman in a Thai-Lue village of Northern Thailand. As used by both men, however, the term emphasizes the vulnerable, exposed, and conflict-laden nature of that role. Moerman's headman must serve one party but derive his rewards from the other; he is completely subordinate to his district officer and cannot be sure of any tangible rewards. In the present context, the term has a different connotation. It is assumed here that the "broker" can serve the interests of both his "clients" -- the government and the villagers -- because each has something to gain by the arrangement, and that the rewards for his services will be forthcoming.

#### IV. THE VILLAGE SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The following is a brief outline of the major facets of the village social structure as they relate to problems of internal security.

The social structure of the Thai village is markedly simple. The majority of villagers are likely to feel an enduring commitment to five social units: (1) the "nuclear family" (i.e., parents and their unmarried children), (2) a loosely-defined laterally-oriented system of kinship, (3) the nation-state, (4) the village temple, and (5) the village school.<sup>6</sup> The last two are symbolic of the village itself; they provide the community with its identity. Apart from these five units, however, there are no castes, occupational groupings, neighborhood alliances, or groups expressive of village solidarity (such as councils or governing boards) that might impose a continuing sense of obligation on villagers or to whose norms or behavior they must conform. In most communities, peasants are not expected to contribute their labor to the village, to serve as village guards, to follow the dictates of

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<sup>6</sup>These comments represent a slightly revised version of a description of village social structure appearing in Phillips 1963b.

village elders, or even actively to co-operate with one another. Villagers have a variety of personal friendships, but these are not group relationships based on expectations of reciprocal benefit. The numerous gossip, drinking, and gambling groups are notoriously unstable associations that involve little psychic investment. Except for their obligation to the five institutions mentioned above and to a few functionally specific organizations, indicated below, Thai peasants function primarily as individuals whose major goal in life is to obtain sufficient land to support themselves, their growing children, and their religious obligations, free from physical insecurity and entangling social commitments.

The few organizations serving specific functions are of two kinds: those that emerge only during certain times of the year and those involving only a handful of people. The co-operative work groups for rice-harvesting are illustrative of the former. Even they, however, are arrangements between individual families, and the responsibility for compensating the worker for his labor lies with each participating family, not with the group. The four functionally specific groups involving only a few persons are the temple lay committee, the so-called

village council, the village schoolteachers, and the village headmen. As potential leadership cadres, these groups deserve a few words.

The functions of the temple lay committee are limited to such secular tasks of administration as handling temple finances and arranging fairs and other secular events held in the temple. Membership in the committee brings some prestige, as well as Buddhist merit, to a few select members of the community. While some of these may also have political standing, others are simply ordinary villagers motivated by religious devotion. In the authors' judgment, the tasks of the temple lay committee have by tradition become so confined to temple administration that any attempt to expand its functions to other areas would meet with failure.

The government-created "village (tambon) councils" were established by fiat in 1956, when each hamlet in a commune was authorized to elect one member, and these, together with the headmen ex officio, constituted the council. In the words of the Interior Department (1958), they were "encouraged to better their standard of living and provide for the amenities of the villages, such as roads, bridges, wells, and dams, with advice and



guidance of Nai Amphurs [district officers]. They [were] expected to find labourers and money among themselves in the spirit of self help."

Although many villages today have their village councils, these are for the most part paper organizations. In one village known intimately to one of the authors, council members were selected by the headmen and attended only one meeting in two years, where they "approved" the tambon and muban budget presented by the district officer. The author interviewed several of the members, three of whom did not know what their function was supposed to be. The institution thus far lacks vitality; certainly, in the particular village studied, it had not become a means of expressing village solidarity. Its future potential is impossible to assess, but the authors' opinion about the need for outside leadership is confirmed by the Interior Department's summary statement: "In practice, the success or failure of the Tambol (tambon) Authorities in any particular district depends very much on the attitude of the Nai Amphur towards them." (Thailand, Department of the Interior, 1958.)

Of the various institutionally important personalities in rural Thailand, perhaps none is sociologically

as significant for the problems of internal security as the village schoolteacher or head schoolteacher. Although teachers have no formal authority, their informal power is considerable. Because of their relatively modern outlook and the likelihood that they have instructed most of the younger people in the community, they are often the most respected secular leaders in the village. The assistant district officers interviewed unanimously reported that, in intra-village problems or conflicts, the individual most frequently sought out for counsel or mediation is the head schoolteacher, along with the local Buddhist abbot, by preference over the local headman. The viability of any village security measure -- such as, for example, a village defense corps (see Section V of this memorandum) -- is likely, therefore, to depend on the approval, if not the organizational counsel, of the head schoolteachers.

The position of the abbot or head monk of the local temple is a significant one in the structure of the Thai rural community. Generally speaking, he enjoys the greatest prestige in the community and serves as its moral leader. Therefore, his specific approval should be considered as essential to the success of any course

of action not fully sanctioned by tradition. The abbots, and monks in general, are not likely to become active leaders in the development of any program, since the Buddhist religion commits them to an essentially contemplative life. Nevertheless, the abbot, in particular, customarily plays the part of counselor and adviser to the community on matters both sacred and profane, and his disapproval could drain the vitality from any effort.

Throughout this paper, relatively little attention has been given to the potential contribution of the village headman to internal security. This omission has not been unintentional. His role varies considerably from one part of rural Thailand to another: in some villages he is a dynamic community leader; in others, a passive (and often senile) messenger boy for the district officer. In many instances, his authority is not commensurate with what one would expect from his official title. Most headmen perform their official functions quite adequately; they keep birth and death records, inform villagers of decisions made by the district officer, detain suspected criminals until the arrival of the police, record land and livestock sales, see to it that villagers pay special taxes, and entertain

visiting officials. But the possession of true power clearly is not an intrinsic attribute of this role. Some headmen have nevertheless achieved power by virtue of their personalities. The majority, however, have no genuine authority over their fellow-villagers. As reported by Moerman (1962b), headmen in parts of northern Thailand are but ineffectual political brokers between their villagers and the district officer. Their position is a result not only of the totally different sets of expectations that their two "clients" have of them but also of the fact that they have little to offer to either client. The villagers in the community in which Moerman worked expect that the headman will "not fear the officials" and will "protect the community from the government". the district officer expects that the headman will organize and recruit villagers for road construction and other district needs. When the headman meets the demands of the district officer, he loses leadership and prestige in the eyes of the villagers; when he meets the expectations of his villagers, he loses his value to the district officer. In other parts of rural Thailand, the problem is somewhat different. In the Central Plain, for example, administrative units

have become so gerrymandered -- through administrative oversight rather than political intention -- that very often there is no relationship at all between a "natural" community, sociologically viewed, and the constituency of the headman. Thus, a single community may cut across the territories of several different headmen, or, conversely, a community may have a headman who makes his home in another village. In some cases, one community even overlaps the territories of two different district officers, and the result is conflict, confusion, and often inertia. Under these circumstances, the role of headman is an extremely difficult one.

V. THE VILLAGERS' POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS  
TO INTERNAL SECURITY

Any program designed to deal with communist subversion at the village level in Thailand should have at least two aims: (1) to deny the Communists potential recruits; (2) to develop village organizations or cadres capable of responding to and overcoming communist penetration. These two aims are closely related.

Activities that would deny the Communists potential recruits must, of course, take place on a broad front. There is one point along this front, however, that merits special emphasis. It seems clear that, besides the few individuals (and in Thailand the emphasis should be placed upon "few") who are ideologically predisposed to communism, the richest source of recruits for the Communists are those villagers who, dissatisfied with their lot, are a source of disturbance within their communities. At least three such groups can be identified, though they have as yet exhibited few, if any, organizational characteristics and therefore are not recognized as "groups" in most communities. They are (1) veterans, (2) unemployed villagers, and (3) youths, particularly the phuu paaw.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>This term, meaning "unmarried men" or "subordinates," is applied in the northeast to groups of young men who act as both bodyguards and troublemakers at village fairs, weddings, and the like.

The disaffection of veterans is due mainly to the fact that they return to their home villages with the expectation of being honored for having worn a uniform and having lived in a more sophisticated world, only to find that prestige is not forthcoming. The Communists not only can award them the status that they desire but can make ready use of their military talents. The unemployed are especially easy prey for the Communists because they are both poor and idle. As indicated earlier, much the same applies to many village boys, particularly during the hot season when they are not needed for rice farming.<sup>8</sup>

The point of these remarks, of course, is that just as the Communists might exploit the motivations and even the skills of these marginal groups, so might the Thai government. These people, in fact, could form the basis of a village defense corps on the order of the recently authorized Corps of Territorial Defense Volunteers (Bangkok Post, August 21, 1962). Conceivably, soldiers

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<sup>8</sup>It might be noted in passing that perhaps the major reason that military efforts in Laos have tended to dwindle at the beginning of the rainy season is not that the terrain becomes impassable but that the troops are needed on the farms for rice planting.



could be trained prior to their discharge in the organization and activities of such a village defense corps.

The most crucial point about a program of this kind, however, is not that it be brought into existence -- in Thailand it is all too easy to form paper organizations -- but that those who volunteer to take part in it be assigned to constructive and personally rewarding activities. Certainly the most useful function it could serve at present would be in civic action work, under the direction of, and later possibly in substitution for, the proposed Thai Army Civic Action teams. A major difficulty with these army teams is that, although they could obviously be very useful on construction and road-building projects and would also provide evidence of the government's interest in serving the peasantry, they do little to alleviate, and may even aggravate, an already serious rural unemployment problem. Combining civic action and village defense activity in an organization of local villagers would serve to avoid this problem. The experience and training that young villagers would gain by participating in civic action work would be desirable. Beyond this, they could be trained in police techniques and in how to organize their villages for defensive purposes.

For obvious reasons, these suggestions do not include military training as such. The establishment of a village defense corps carries with it certain intrinsic dangers. A heavily militarized village defense corps, created to meet a communist threat that may never materialize, might very well constitute a hazard to the social order. Therefore, the emphasis ought to be on the practical, technical, and service dimensions of the program, and not on its aggressive, military potential.

The organizational problems in developing a village defense corps should not be overlooked. There is a dilemma to be faced. It is clear that the present administrative structure, consisting of district officers and village headmen, is not capable of supporting a still heavier burden. And even if it were, there is serious doubt that village headmen have the authority, leadership caliber, temperament, and competence to organize an effective paramilitary organization. Also, the fact that village headmen represent established political interests would obviously lessen their sway over the veterans and village youths. On the other hand, if this program were organized and directed by an

extension of the civil service or by army representatives, which would ensure a more effective and politically secure organization, it might become competitive with the regular administrative system and thereby engender conflicts within the community. One way out of this dilemma might be to put the organization and training functions of the program in the hands of outside representatives -- which could be justified on technical grounds -- and the authority for its execution in the hands of the village headman and head schoolteacher, with the latter playing a crucial advisory role.

A word about an easily overlooked but essential element of any program of this kind. If such a project is to have vitality, if it is to be consistent with the traditional attitudes and motivations of its members, it should be set up with some of the rituals and trappings of a respectable quasi-military organization. This does not mean spit and polish; one of the luxuries of being a veteran is not having to conform to rigid military demands. However, if possible, the members of a village defense corps should be outfitted in some distinctive uniform and should receive certificates of service and token payment for their time and effort.

Equally important, any contributions they made to the community, such as through civic action, should be ceremonially acknowledged in public. Above all, the voluntary nature of their participation should always be remembered. For, if such a program were to acquire overtones of corvée labor, it could become a political boomerang.

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